

Let the Redeemed of the Lord Say So

Psalm 107

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Psalm 107 is a storyteller's delight. Four stories, each just six or seven verses, are told as tight and terse tales of distress, rescue, and thanksgiving. Each one plays off the theme that is introduced in the first verse of the psalm. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." Each one is in answer to the call that comes in the second verse. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." A short, concise, well told story can inspire and move people. In the case of Psalm 107, these heartfelt testimonies can lead the reader to move from an outside observer to being an active participant. This little session of a "say so" can be an avenue for the listener to move from the pit of distress to the glorious relief of a rescue, resulting in yet another child of God whose song becomes one of thanksgiving. At least that is how I read Psalm 107.

To help us examine these four stories of distress, rescue, and thanksgiving, I want to tell you a little story of distress. A man was walking down the street one day when he fell into an uncovered manhole. He landed at the bottom, and realized he was stuck. A physician walked by and the man called out, "Hey doc, can you give me some help?" The physician obliged. He wrote a prescription and dropped it in the manhole. A while later a pastor walked by. Again the man called out, "Hey pastor, can you give me some help?" The pastor, he obliged. He bowed down and said a prayer. Later, a friend walked by. The man shouted out in desperation, "Hey, can you give me some help?" The friend said sure. A moment later, the man stuck in the hole heard a thud. The friend had jumped into the manhole with him. The man cringed with frustration and said, "Are you crazy? Now we are both stuck in here." The friend looked at him and said with a smile, "We're not stuck. I've been here before, and I know the way out."

I heard that story on a television show. On the show there was a character who had been shot and was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Any noise resembling gunfire, even breaking glass or a backfire from a car would push him over the edge. When he was about at his lowest point, the deepest and darkest corner of the pit, a friend came alongside him. The friend didn't try to solve the problem for him. The friend didn't tell him to get over it and look on the bright side. The friend just told him a little story about a guy who fell in a hole and couldn't get out. And then his friend jumped in with him. The friend who told the story knew a thing or two about being stuck in a hole. He had hit rock bottom when he realized he was an alcoholic. About a year later on that same show, the guy who had been dealing with PTSD was at a better place, but the guy who was a recovering alcoholic was under a great deal of stress, facing judgment and shame

for his past. One of the sweetest moments of that show was when the fellow dealing with PTSD came alongside the friend who was a recovering alcoholic. Knowing he was going through a really tough time, he simply put his arm around him his shoulder and said, “A man was walking down the street one day and he fell into a hole...” He was telling his friend that just like he had been there in his time of need, he was going to be there for his friend. How? He had been there before and he knew the way out.

Psalm 107 is what is called in some religious circles a “say so.” You don’t have all the answers. You can’t explain everything. You can’t make any guarantees. But you have a story to tell. The story basically says, “I’ve been in a hole before. And I found a way out.” The common element in a religious “say so” is that it is always God who gets us out. It is always God who rescues. It is always God who delivers.

On the off chance that at least a few of you here today might be feeling like you are in a deep hole, for whatever reason, um, I don’t know, you might read the paper or watch the news, you might have heard of earthquakes and hurricanes and fires and floods, you might have heard the rattling of sabers that are much more dangerous than sabers as our wars now might be fought with nuclear weapons...or if you have been listening to the prayer concerns shared here about sickness, suffering, heartache, disappointment and loss, or about a bike path in New York where a hate filled man ran down innocent people or a concert in Las Vegas or a shooter at a Walmart in Colorado...well, I’m just going to assume I’m not the only one, so on the off chance that you might relate to the guy who fell in a hole, let me tell you some stories of some folks who have been there. Let me share with you this little “say so” from the Bible. I’m hoping by the end of it you might be stirred up enough to believe that in our times of distress God is there to deliver us, and that very deliverance is both our inspiration and our call to give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love.

Psalm 107

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story—
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,
those he gathered from the lands,
from east and west, from north and south...”

And then the “say so” begins.

**“Some wandered in desert wastelands,
finding no way to a city where they could settle.
They were hungry and thirsty,
and their lives ebbed away.**

**Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress.
He led them by a straight way
to a city where they could settle.
Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind,
for he satisfies the thirsty
and fills the hungry with good things.”**

Maybe you've been in a desert, a dry and barren place, isolated, alone, hungry and thirsty and you just felt your life ebbing away. Cry out to the Lord and he will deliver you from your distress. That's what this "say so" says.

But that's not all.

**“Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness,
prisoners suffering in iron chains,
because they rebelled against God's commands
and despised the plans of the Most High.
So he subjected them to bitter labor;
they stumbled, and there was no one to help.
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.
He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness,
and broke away their chains.
Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind,
for he breaks down gates of bronze
and cuts through bars of iron.”**

Who hasn't sat in darkness, as this "say so" says, in utter darkness. One of the great tragedies of life is sometimes we make our own prison, we forge our own chains. This "say so" talks about the times we rebelled against God and the commands of God. We made our own mess. We stumbled. We fell. There was no one to help. But then we cried to the Lord and he saved us from our distress. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.

**“Some became fools through their rebellious ways
and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.
They loathed all food
and drew near the gates of death.
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.
He sent out his word and healed them;**

**he rescued them from the grave.
Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.
Let them sacrifice thank offerings
and tell of his works with songs of joy.”**

Sometimes a “say so” says what we wish it didn’t say. Sometimes we are fools. We grab for the forbidden fruit and forfeit our place in the garden. We bow down to the golden calf when if we just waited a few more days Moses would have appeared with God’s sacred word. We trust in lies and false promises and wander far from God. The psalmist could go on and on. But interestingly enough, in this particular section, once he makes his point he doesn’t beat us over the head. He doesn’t hammer it home relentlessly. Within just two verses he allows us to cry out to the Lord, and God saves us from our distress. And in a say so that moves so quickly from our foolishness to God’s rescue, we find his word is a healing word, that he rescues us from the grave. In response we sacrifice a thank offering and tell of all God’s works with songs of joy.

**“Some went out on the sea in ships;
they were merchants on the mighty waters.
They saw the works of the Lord,
his wonderful deeds in the deep.
For he spoke and stirred up a tempest
that lifted high the waves.
They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths;
in their peril their courage melted away.
They reeled and staggered like drunkards;
they were at their wits’ end.
Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.
He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.
They were glad when it grew calm,
and he guided them to their desired haven.
Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for mankind.
Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people
and praise him in the council of the elders.”**

This last say so is interesting. Some went out on ships, they set sail on a grand voyage, they saw the wonderful works of God, they rode the highest wave and descended to the deepest depths. It was a grand adventure, but at some point they realized they were in over their heads. They were at their wits’ end. When life just

becomes too much, they cried out to the Lord and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper and the waves of the sea were hushed. So let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love.

The words of this say so are all found in the Old Testament. You wouldn't have to work too hard to connect these testimonies that are told in such glory and grandeur to stories like Joseph in prison, Israel in Egypt, wandering in the desert for forty years, Jonah on the great waves and in the belly of the whale, Elijah hiding in fear from the wicked Queen Jezebel, or heartbroken refugees gathered by a river in Babylon struggling to even find a song to sing as they lived in exile in such a strange land. You can just imagine a campfire, and one by one people who have been delivered by the Lord are standing up to take their turn at this "say so".

The words of this say so are all found in the Old Testament. When we find ourselves in the pit, in a deep and dark hole, we can turn to these tight and terse tales of rescue, and in hearing from others who have been in the pit, who have been in the deep and dark hole, we can find hope that God will be with us, that God will rescue us.

What if we weren't bound to just the stories of the Old Testament? What if we literally turned the page and made room for people from the New Testament to have a say so? What if those who had been in a pit and found God had been there for them took their turn, told their story? I shared with you the image of a friend jumping into the hole with us, landing with a thud. We're drawing near to Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Thud! The best sounding Thud you've ever heard. That's what happened in Bethlehem. God jumped into this hole with us. Do you think you could cobble together a little say so out of what happened when God jumped into this world?

I was blind, but now I see...said the blind man.

I was lame, but now I walk.

I was deaf, but now I hear.

I was a leper, but now I'm clean.

I was an outcast, but now I belong.

I was lost, but now I'm found.

I was a sinner, but he washed me clean and made me whole.

I was unlovely, but he has filled my life with love.

All of this and more, all of this and more, just because the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. We were in distress. God heard our cry. Jesus was born. He set us free. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.

The redeemed of the Lord...that is a powerful phrase. That is a provocative phrase. One of the definitions of redeemed is to be bought back at a great price. That when we are in the pit of despair, we really are in chains, we are captive, we are stuck, there are forces and powers in opposition to God, and they can really get their hooks into us. The redeemed of the Lord, the ones who say so, come to understand that it wasn't just that Jesus jumped into a deep and dark hole with us, he jumped into this deep and dark hole for us. He does know the way out. But he knows the way out because he is the way out. He does something that redeems us, that buys us back at a great price...at a great price.

There is a part of our story about Jesus that says he jumped into this deep and dark hole of broken humanity, a humanity caught up in the struggle of good and evil, a humanity that is endangered by forces of hatred and wickedness and spiritual powers in total rebellion against God. Jesus jumped into this deep and dark hole not only to be with us, but to be for us, to set us free by taking our place, by taking our sin, by taking our sadness, by taking our sentence, by taking our judgment, by taking our death upon himself. He did it all alone. The lonely cry from the cross must never be forgotten by the redeemed, the ones bought back at a great price. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He came into our pit and he took our place.

Because he experienced that forsaken feeling, that feeling of being all alone, of being cut off from God, when he had passed through death and come back to eternal life, he sealed the deal for us. When he says, "I will never leave you and I will never forsake you", he has earned the right to say that. He has proved that it is true. And there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God that he has given in Jesus Christ.

On the off chance that you know what it is like to have fallen into a deep and dark hole and felt overwhelmed and underpowered and hopeless and helpless, let me just say one word to you today. Thud! Thud! Thud! Somebody has jumped in with you. Somebody has jumped in with me. Somebody has jumped in with us. Somebody has jumped in with this whole human race. Thud! Somebody has jumped in with us. His name is Jesus. And he not only knows the way out, he is the way out. You don't even really have to grab hold of him, because he has already grabbed hold of you. He has bought you back at a great price. You have been redeemed.

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." Oh, yes, he is good. Oh, yes, his love endures...forever. That's what we are talking about when we say, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."